

JANUARY 23, 1978

ANNCR:

PAKISTAN APPEARS TO BE CONSIDERING THE ADVANTAGES OF CLOSER RELATIONS WITH INDIA, PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD.

CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN OF OUR SOUTH ASIA BUREAU SENT THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

THE TREND IS APPARENT IN AN ARTICLE WHICH APPEARS IN THE LATEST ISSUE OF AN INFLUENTIAL PAKISTANI JOURNAL, THE PAKISTAN ECONOMIST. THE MAGAZINE ASSERTS THAT OFFICIALS IN ISLAMABAD ARE NOW STRONGLY CONVINCED THAT REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION COULD BE THE ANSWER TO MANY OF PAKISTAN'S PROBLEMS. THE MAGAZINE ADDS THAT BOTH BUSINESSMEN AND ECONOMISTS ARE AGREED THAT PAKISTAN HAD NOTHING TO FEAR FROM SUCH COOPERATION. IN THE WORDS OF THE ARTICLE, "GONE ARE THE DAYS WHEN THIS COULD HAVE MEANT THE INDIAN CAMEL DISRUPTING THE TENT."

THE PAKISTAN ECONOMIST ARTICLE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT PUBLIC OPINION IN PAKISTAN AS YET MAY N O T BE FULLY PREPARED FOR SUCH A DEVELOPMENT. BUT IT SAYS THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THE PAKISTANI PEOPLE COULD N O T BE LED TO UNDERSTAND THAT CLOSER ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH INDIA ARE IN THEIR OWN INTEREST, AND IT STRESSED THE NEED TO PREPARE THE WAY WISELY SO AS N O T TO RIDE ROUGHSHOD OVER PUBLIC SENSIBILITIES.

THE PAKISTAN ECONOMIST ARTICLE TAKES ON ADDED SIGNIFICANCE IN VIEW OF THE PLANNED VISIT OF INDIAN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER A.B. VAJPAYEE TO PAKISTAN. WHILE NO DATE HAS BEEN FIXED, THE VISIT IS EXPECTED LATER THIS MONTH OR EARLY IN FEBRUARY. AND BOTH GOVERNMENTS HAVE INDICATED THEY EXPECT IT TO LEAD TO A VISIT TO INDIA BY PAKISTAN'S MILITARY RULER, GENERAL ZIA AL HAR.

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES HAVE IMPROVED DRAMATICALLY SINCE THE DARK DAYS FOLLOWING THE 1971 INDIA - PAKISTAN WAR -- THE CONFLICT THAT LED TO ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH IN WHAT WAS FORMERLY EAST PAKISTAN. NORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WERE RESTORED IN 1976. AIR AND RAIL LINKS ALSO WERE RESTORED -- ALONG WITH TELEPHONE AND POSTAL COMMUNICATIONS. HOWEVER, TRADE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES HAS BEEN MINIMAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION ALMOST NON-EXISTENT. THERE IS NOTHING TO PARALLEL THE JOINT VENTURES INDIA IS EXPLORING WITH ONE OTHER NATIONS SUCH AS NEPAL, BANGLADESH, AND SRI LANKA.

HOW WOULD INDIA REACT TO SUCH OVERTURES? INDIAN PRIME MINISTER MORARJI DESAI RECENTLY TOLD A NEWS CONFERENCE THAT INDIA LOOKS AT THE COMING EXCHANGE OF VISITS AS A FURTHER STEP TOWARD NORMAL RELATIONS. THE NEW JANATA ADMINISTRATION HAS MADE CLOSER RELATIONS WITH ALL OF ITS NEIGHBORS, A TOP OBJECTIVE OF ITS FOREIGN POLICY. AND JUDGING FROM THE SPATE OF EDITORIALS AND ARTICLES WHICH HAVE APPEARED IN INDIAN NEWSPAPERS RECENTLY, PARTICULARLY ON INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS, ANY MOVES IN THIS DIRECTION WOULD HAVE BROAD SUPPORT IN INDIA.

GH/RCS